

FACTSHEET

NATIVE GRASSLANDS FOR WILDLIFE, FORAGE, AND BIOMASS

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to help producers establish diverse native grasslands for high quality wildlife habitat, forage, and biomass production. This program is designed to give technical and financial assistance for both the establishment and management of native grasslands in Pennsylvania for wildlife, forage, and biomass production purposes.

Native grasslands are beneficial in many ways:

Provide high quality habitat for many native species of Pennsylvania wildlife. Species that benefit the most from this habitat are native, grassland dependent wildlife species, whose numbers have been in sharp decline throughout Pennsylvania and much of their former range in the U.S.

Diverse plantings of native grasses and wildflowers provide habitat for beneficial insects which pollinate plants and provide food for other wildlife.

Grasslands promote healthy soil: protecting it from erosion, building organic matter, retaining moisture, and maintaining natural biological activity.

Grasslands used as filter strips or buffers can also filter sediment, nutrients, and pesticides from agricultural runoff.

As grasslands reduce runoff, they help to protect water quality and *quantity* within our watersheds by allowing water (which may have otherwise run off) to infiltrate into the ground where it can recharge underground water supplies.

Properly managed grasslands can provide large quantities of biomass for renewable energy and forage for livestock, while providing some or all of the above mentioned benefits to water quality and wildlife.

Farmers managing native grasslands for biomass production save energy, time, and money growing this perennial crop compared to traditional annual crops.

Grass biomass is considered “carbon neutral” as it consumes as much or more carbon from the atmosphere than is released when the plant is ultimately burned for energy.



Financial Assistance from EQIP

USDA-NRCS funding is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Program Basics:

The Establishment Incentive for grasslands is a one-time flat rate reimbursement of either \$165, \$210 or \$275 per acre depending on seeding. The incentive payment covers seed costs, site preparation, seeding, and follow-up weed control during the first year of the contract.

Management Incentives are available for producers who wish to manage their grasslands for maximum wildlife benefit. These payments are paid once per year for up to three years after the seeding year. \$175 per acre per year is available to producers to leave fields un-harvested, or \$85 when harvest timeframes minimize habitat disturbance during their contract periods.



Who is Eligible?

- Agricultural producers are eligible to apply for EQIP (at least \$1000 of agricultural products produced and sold on the farm).
- Applicants must have control of the land for the entire contract period.

How to Apply?

- Submit a completed form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Contract Application, to the local USDA-NRCS office in your area. If you are unsure where your local office is located, or to get the application form, visit our website at <http://www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov/>
- Applicants can sign up any time; there are periodic application ranking dates when applications on file will be ranked and prioritized.

The following forms must be filed at the USDA Service Center before applications can be processed:

- AD-1026 – Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation (HELC/WC) Certification;
- CCC- 526 – Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Certification;
- CCC-501A-Member's Information (for entity and joint operations);

Technical Assistance:

Technical assistance is available through your local USDA-NRCS office for detailed planning assistance and site specific recommendations. Contact your local office for more information. Visit Pennsylvania NRCS online for more information about this and other conservation related topics. <http://www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov/news/publications.html>